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ABSTRACT

Reform of undergraduate education is sweeping the United States and the design of the writing major at Millikin University (Decatur, Illinois), is an example of this movement. The writing major was in need of reform because, in addition to the English major core of literature surveys, Shakespeare, and a course in the history of grammar and the English language, students were to take 15 credits of advanced writing courses. The English department had surveyed alumni and knew what its graduates were doing: graduate school, writing and editing positions, and teaching were the three most common career paths. With this knowledge, goals for the writing major were drafted: (1) a more carefully designed progression of courses, including a capstone senior course; (2) more publishing and editing skills; (3) courses to familiarize students with technology skills necessary for writing and publishing careers; and (4) courses to introduce majors to the rich intellectual history of writing theory. Over the next two years (1989-1991), the English department faculty reviewed and redesigned the writing major. Now, all writing majors take three core writing courses in addition to the English major: computer aided publishing; a course in applying writing theory; and a senior portfolio seminar to synthesize their total writing experience. Writing majors must also take at least three additional advanced writing courses in creative writing, business and professional writing, news writing, computer documentation, legal writing, on-line publishing, report writing, science writing, autobiography, and other special courses. (TB)

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Designing the Professional Writing Major: A Rationale for Multiplicity Versus Specialization

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"Millikin University is a selective, comprehensive undergraduate university of approximately 1800 students, with schools of arts and science, business, fine arts, and nursing. Founded in 1901, the University is in the midst of implementing an ambitious plan to establish national prominence. An innovative program in liberal learning, a comprehensive faculty excellence program, a commitment to diversity and service learning are important elements of this plan. Millikin faculty are expected to excel at student-centered teaching and contribute scholarship appropriate to both their discipline and an institution that highlights quality teaching."

Reform of undergraduate education is sweeping the nation and the design of the writing major at Millikin University is an example of this movement. We are a small university; we can design and implement change quickly. We are more intimate; our writing major courses are limited to enrollments of 15. We can reform quickly; our faculty governance process is not a demilitarized zone. We have a faculty who are accessible to students and to each other. We have always had an extremely dedicated faculty who put high priority on quality teaching based on longterm mastery/apprentice relationships with students. We espouse an ideal faculty of reflective practitioners, applying knowledge to community, profession, and pedagogy.

When I was hired in 1989, I was asked to lead the department in a curriculum review of the writing major. At this time the writing major consisted of only one requirement beyond the English major core of literature surveys, Shakespeare, and a course in the history of grammar and the English language—students were to take 15 credits of advanced writing courses. When I interviewed our students, they talked about courses they took, but they had no common knowledge or skills. They couldn't explain what a writing major is or does beyond a list of courses taken. They had no critical perspective of what a writing major is or can do. Most of them knew a single word processing program, but they were clearly lacking basic technical knowledge of contemporary publishing and editing. They knew broad literary history, but they lacked any knowledge of the intellectual heritage of rhetoric or writing theory.

The English department had surveyed alumni and knew what our graduates were doing: graduate school, writing and editing positions, and teaching were the three most common career paths. We set some goals for the writing major: (1) we needed to more carefully plan the progression of courses, including a capstone senior course, (2) we needed to provide more publishing and editing opportunities, (3) we needed to teach contemporary technology skills necessary for writing or publishing careers, and (4) we needed to introduce our majors to the rich intellectual heritage of writing theory.

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Over the next two years, from 1989 to 1991, the English department faculty reviewed and redesigned the writing major. Now, all writing majors take three core writing courses in addition to the English major core: computer aided publishing to develop contemporary technical skills, a course in applying writing theory in order to understand the historical intellectual tradition of written discourse and a senior writing portfolio seminar to synthesize their total writing experience at Millikin.

Writing majors also must take at least three additional advanced writing courses, (available on a rotating basis) in creative writing, business and professional writing, news writing, computer documentation, legal writing, on-line publishing, report writing, science writing, autobiography and other special courses. The core requirements provide essential skills and knowledge, and the advanced writing courses provide opportunities for a variety of experiences for the student to develop additional expertise in a specific area of interest. These areas include technical writing, creative writing, journalism, public relations (in conjunction with the communication department) and publishing. Most students are also encouraged to have a writing internship in the community, using their writing abilities to help an organization fulfill its mission.

As we implemented the new writing major, we also recognized two related problems with course sequencing. Almost all of our writing major courses were at the junior/senior level so students interested in majoring in writing had to wait until their junior year to get started (and younger undergraduate students in advanced writing studies reduced the level of studies to introductions instead of truly advanced courses). Clearly we had to find a way to get majors started earlier in their undergraduate studies if we wanted a three or four year mastery/apprenticeship model of development to take place.

For example, many of our majors wanted to take creative writing, but it is such a popular course junior level course that it routinely filled with honors students and seniors (who get to enroll before the other students). Also, there were no course offerings in the writing major for first year or sophomore students, except for the one credit journalism workshop (during which students learn by working on the student newspaper). To alleviate these problems, the department moved an advanced writing course, nonfiction writing, to the sophomore year redesigning the course as a sophomore writing seminar. Also, we added an introduction to creative writing as a one credit "creative roundtable" workshop which is listed at the first year level.

We continue to review and reconsider the redesigned writing major. For example, a number of our students have requested a course in style, so we are developing an advanced writing study. Numerous students, both in the major and from other areas, have requested a formal study of copyediting. We are currently in the process of developing a "professional copyediting" workshop to address this need. The writing major is achieving several of its original goals, and, hopefully, it is also flexible enough to respond to changes such as the recent rapid development of hypermedia writing and publishing.

Sequencing Strategy of the Writing Major

Beginning the Major: start making connections with writing majors early
- one credit workshops (journalism, creative writing)
- involve in writing major social activities (coffee shop, readings)

Middle of the Major: develop essential skills and knowledge mastery
- sophomore writing seminars for personal mastery of expression
- computer aided publishing (user ability, design theory, publication management, tutoring others)
- literary heritage surveys (British and American literature)
- news writing, business & professional writing, technical writing
- participation in editorial teams

Advanced Studies: integration of theory and practice, professional & community
- applying writing theory (rhetorical theory & writing process research)
- nonfiction writing, feature writing, science writing
- creative writing, literary editing
- computer documentation, user testing, online publishing (hypermedia)
- writing internships, service learning projects in the community
- editing leadership, computer classroom tutor opportunities
- writing fellows in writing in the disciplines program

Capstone Experiences: synthesis and multidisciplinary perspective
- senior writing portfolio seminar (reflective practice assembled)
- advanced literary seminars
- editing leadership positions and tutoring positions
- interdisciplinary writing and editing project team leaders

Our sequencing strategy is to start making connections with writing majors early in their undergraduate studies, develop essential skills for writing and publishing during the sophomore year, challenge the students to apply their knowledge and skills during the junior and senior years, and to deliberately help the student develop critical perspective by synthesizing their experiences into a portfolio.

The major invites students into a disciplinary home, where special skills and knowledge are developed. Then it asks students to use their knowledge and abilities both at college and in the community. Students make connections to other disciplines through their writing, editing and publishing activities with faculty and students from across the disciplines. And they gain an appreciation of their own abilities in the workplace through internships and service learning projects. The major deliberately attempts to build connections between theory and practice, the self and community, academia and workplace, and finally, between writing and other disciplines. The final test of the major is whether or not the student can perform on their own, become part of a team to solve problems or needs outside the confines of the university. Although we build on four years of mastery/apprentice writing activities, we conclude by challenging the student to go solo, to apply their knowledge decisively, to take risks in order to achieve their writing dreams.

Liberal Learning and the Writing Major

The writing major is based on a careful blending of professional skills and intellectual development of student writers. The major's design and courses is informed by contemporary rhetorical theory and research on writing in the workplace. It was successfully implemented at Millikin because of our commitment to providing the necessary skills and knowledge for our students to succeed in their chosen areas of academic study and professional work.

The new master skills are learned by informed action: the ability to work as a team, the ability to adapt to new situations, the ability to transfer knowledge from one area to another, the ability to communicate to a variety of people ranging from experts to the general public, the ability to learn how to use new technology quickly, the ability to analyze problems in order to find innovative solutions, and finally, the ability to continually learn how to learn new things.

When a team of writing and communications majors go into a nonprofit agency to develop publicity, they must use their listening skills and analytical abilities to uncover the appropriate image for the organization and in order to find the best theme and design for publications. They must use their knowledge of visual design and persuasion in order for the publications to be effective. They must be able to create camera ready proofs using current technology. Performance.

Finally, I believe that Millikin's writing major has been so successful because of the influence of our professional schools. The professional school majors are very coherent because of clear goals—the students are preparing for professional work in music, art, nursing, accounting and so on. I view the writing major in the same way. Our students are preparing for professional work in writing as technical writers, journalists, editors, document designers and so on. The key perspective is that writing is a performance art, not merely a subject to be studied. Student need to know the intellectual heritage of writing theory, but they must also know how to design a user manual. We do not have to choose between the mechanic and the philosopher; we need to integrate both into the individual writer, into a reflective practitioner who not only knows how to get the job done, but also why.

Antonious and Crassus were both wrong. We don't have to take sides. We don't have to be a liberal art nor a professional technique. We must be both reflective and practical. We must know the theory as well as the application. We must master the techne of writing as well as obtain a critical perspective of writing as a discipline in itself.

New

Professional Writing Major Rationale

Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois
- comprehensive university, 1800 students
- arts/sciences, business, fine arts, nursing
- implementing liberal learning plan

Stresses **mastery/apprentice teaching**
- 3-4 year relationship with students
- commitment to small class size
- coherence of four year experience
- deliberate connection of theory & practice
- reflective practice of discipline in the community (performance) (action)
- preparation for professional success

Writing Major at MU
The Problem
Goals of the Major
Redesigned Writing Major
Course Requirements
Starting the Major
Sequencing Strategy
How Much Theory?
How much research?
Connections Beyond?
Kinds of Learning?
Professional Performance

Writing Major Notes

New

The Problem

There are few precedences in recent history for writing majors, so most have emerged from a cluster of disparate advanced writing courses (or they have evolved from technical writing programs).

Millikin's writing major in the 1980s: take the English literature core plus any 15 hours of advanced writing courses.

The problem is the students:
- had no common knowledge/skills unique to writing majors
- couldn't explain what a writing major is or does (no coherence)
- lacked technical knowledge of contemporary publishing & editing
- lacked any knowledge of intellectual heritage of writing theory

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Writing Major Notes

New

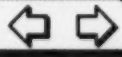
Goals of the Major

Coherence—unified by a **social epistemic** view of writing so writers need **a repertoire of strategies** and **voices** for a broad range of social, political, academic and workplace situations.

Professional Skills—mastery of **writing** processes, copy**editing**, computer aided **publishing**, information **design**, and hypermedia.

Connections—between **theory** & **practice**, self & society, academic disciplines & writing, poetic & rhetoric, school & work.

Critical Perspective—an awareness of **abilities** and **limitations** and **value** of being a writing major, a synthesis of learning, and an awareness of need for lifelong learning as a professional writer.

* **  Writing Major Notes

New

Redesigned Writing Major

Implementation Goals:

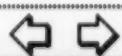
(1) carefully plan the sequencing of courses, including capstone

(2) provide more publishing and editing opportunities

(3) teach contemporary technology skills necessary for professional writing or publishing careers (not just word proc.)

(4) introduce students to intellectual heritage of writing theory

(5) develop critical perspective through interdisciplinary projects, community service, and workplace internships

* **  Writing Major Notes

New

Course Requirements

Writing Core: (required course each year: sophomore, junior, senior)

• Computer Publishing • Writing Theory • Senior Portfolio Seminar

Literary Heritage Core: (same for all English majors)

• American Lit • British Lit • Shakespeare • History of English

Advanced Studies/Writing Career Paths: (at least three courses)

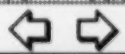
Journalism—newswriting 1 & 2, feature writing

Creative—creative writing 1 & 2, nonfiction, literary editing

Technical Writing—computer documentation, online editing & publishing

Business Writing—introduction, public relations, reports & proposals

Internships strongly recommended in each path (3.0 GPA required)

• ••  Writing Major Notes

New

Starting the Major

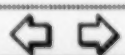
After establishing the new requirements and developing a plan for course rotations to offer a variety of advanced writing studies, we began **fine tuning the overall four year experience**.

Problem: our students were getting into advanced studies to soon which reduces them to introductory level courses. We did not offer enough writing major courses for Freshman & Sophomores.

Solution: one credit workshops in

(1) **journalism** (working with the student newspaper),

(2) **creative writing** "roundtable" workshop projects, and a three credit sophomore writing seminar on various topics.

• ••  Writing Major Notes

New

Sequencing Strategy

Beginning—establish relationship with new majors early

- one credit workshops on newspaper and creative writing projects
- involve new writing majors in social activities (cofee shop, readings)

Middle—develop essential knowledge and skills

- computer aided publishing (user, designer, production manager, tutor)
- sophomore seminar & intros to technical, business, or news writing

Advanced Studies—integrate theory & practice in various career paths

- applying writing theory (rhetorical theory & writing process research)
- advanced studies courses (specialize career path or choose mix)
- writing internships, service learning projects, campus tutoring

Capstone Experiences—synthesize learning for critical perspective

- senior writing portfolio seminar with extended writing project
- editing & publishing team leadership positions (campus/community)

New

How Much Theory?

Without theory, the writing major is not an academic discipline.

In all of our courses, we attempt to integrate theory and practice. For example, in Computer Aided Publishing, we place a heavy emphasis on information design theory. Students not only have to master the technology; they have to argue and explain their rationale for all design choies; they have to talk information theory.

The "Applying Writing Theory" course is essential for students to develop intellectual awareness of their abilities and a critical perspective of writing as an academic discipline. This course is team taught, so that the professors can model debates, advice and values of various competing theories. Students apply theory,

New

How much research?

Our writing majors conduct two types of research:

- personal writing ability development/reflections on personal mastery (ongoing self-evaluation, portfolio annotations, senior portfolio)

- firsthand studies of professional practices or writing processes (interviews, protocol analyses, user testing, classroom experiments) (internship observation or process qualitative studies)

The focus of this research is basically reflective practice or the application of theory in professional, community, or interdisciplinary contexts. The primary beneficiary of this research is the student herself, resulting from the application/mastery of theory.

* ** Writing Major Notes

New

Connections Beyond?

Connections to **Community**—community organizations are always looking for help with public relations, grant writing, newsletters and community education efforts. Service learning projects in courses can lead to excellent collaborative efforts between majors & the community.

Connections to **other Disciplines**—faculty across the disciplines are taking more responsibility for teaching writing in their own discourse communities. Writing majors are in high demand as writing fellows to assist with editing, publishing and teaching in other disciplines.

Connections to Professional **Workplace**—guest speakers and student interviews of professionals bring the workplace to your classes, and most workplaces are eager to have interns skilled in writing and publishing.

* ** Writing Major Notes

New

Kinds of Learning?

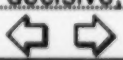
Personal Mastery—confidence in writing abilities, ability to express ideas, achieve personal writing goals, apply knowledge to new situations

Professional Skills—marketable skills required for entry level work related to editing, publishing or writing. (know discourse conventions)

Critical Perspective/Metacognition—understanding of role of writing within academic, social, professional and political communities

Theoretical Framework/Preferences—know variety of theoretical frameworks and how your own preferences empower and limit yourself

Professional Commitment—decisive, informed action, shared values

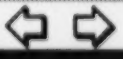
* **  Writing Major Notes

New

Professional Performance?

Professional Schools have coherence because of clear goals. They know their students are preparing for professional work in music, art, nursing, accounting and so forth. Students do not merely study ideas or great professionals; they perform and their teachers are master performers as well. Thus the primary teaching relationship is mastery/apprenticeship with the ultimate goal of independence, proven by the student's own performance.

Writing majors should be geared toward professional, reflective practice—performances of the ability to invent, to arrange, to express, to remember, and finally, to deliver powerful, effective discourses. Writing majors must know technique as well as the broader philosophical issues of the role of discourse in society.

* **  Writing Major Notes